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January 2022

James Mutunga from Nature Kenya leads a detailed monitoring training session for Site Support Groups (SSGs) members (left). SSGs members pose for a group photo during their national workshop held in Nairobi in December 2021. PHOTOS: PATRICK CHANGAWA AND EDWIN UTUMBI

Welcome to the year 2022!

Happy New Year! And welcome to our new office in Malindi at the Coast.

The year 2021 presented unprecedented conservation challenges amid directives to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission. However, Nature Kenya remained resilient. While Covid-19 might be with us for a long time, the vaccine gives us hope for a better year ahead. We urge all our members to stay safe as you support Nature Kenya to continue the work of connecting nature and people. Nature is on a steady decline but it is not too late to take action. Once again, we are counting on your support to safeguard nature during these turbulent times. In January 2022, conservation actions will continue with caution:

1. The Malindi Office is open! The National Museums of Kenya and the Malindi Museum Society are our welcoming hosts. Visit us at the Old DC's office, now a museum, along the waterfront.
2. Waterfowl counts will take place in January and February. See back page for more information.
3. Wednesday Morning Bird walks and Third Sunday Bird walks continue with caution in Nairobi . See back page for details.
4. Malindi bird walks are starting off on various dates to find the most suitable days and times. See back page for details.
5. Members' talks will take place virtually.
6. The Nature Kenya Sales and Membership office will be open to members on weekdays, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Please wear masks, sanitize and keep social distance.
7. Online membership functions to continue: membership can be renewed online http://naturekenya.org/support/membership/or via M-Pesa. Books, honey, etc. may be purchased online or with M-Pesa (Paybill 100300, account "books" or "honey") and collected from the membership office between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.
8. Members will continue to receive an electronic version of the Nature Net. A hard copy of Nature Net can be posted or collected from the office by request to nkmembership@naturekenya.org or telephone 0726 134029.
9. The Nature Kenya conservation office remains closed. Physical conservation meetings in Nairobi and other Covid hotspots to be avoided unless absolutely critical.
10. The EANHS/NMK Library is open from 3rd January. Museum galleries and sites are open to the public under Ministry of Health guidelines.

Nature conservation activities continued locally and nationally in December 2021:

Local Empowerment

The site champions for conservation action called Site Support Groups (SSG) held their national training and experience sharing workshop in Nairobi, with 49 individuals from 25 SSGs in attendance. Participants received training and shared lessons and best practices on forest landscape restoration, holding the government to account—advocacy, species and site monitoring and leadership and governance.

In the Tana River Delta, biodiversity conservation action planning training was conducted with 234 community members participating.

Advocacy and Awareness

A full cabinet meeting chaired by the Tana River County Governor approved the Tana Delta Land Use Plan and the Tana Delta Green Heart Sustainable Development Committee that will oversee the implementation of the Land Use Plan. This committee will progress Tana River Nature Based Solutions in line with Kenya's pledge to green the economy and stop forest loss by 2030.

In Yala Swamp, the Site Support Group and other community-based organisations are supporting Nature Kenya's efforts to stop the National Land Commission from allocating 6700 Ha to a private developer. Nature Kenya initiated an online petition against the intended allocation of the wetland. The allocation was temporarily stopped pending a court case filed by Yala Swamp adjacent dwellers.

Habitat Restoration

The short rains season arrived at last in parts of Mt. Kenya forest. In December 2021, Nature Kenya and four Community Forest Associations (Castle, Naro-Moru, Chehe and Kieni) planted 50,000 trees. Coca-Cola Beverages Africa and Nature Kenya launched their tree planting campaign at Hombe forest. Coca-Cola targets to plant 90,000 trees over three years, with 15,000 earmarked for the December 2021 short rains planting season.

Species and Sites

Human-wildlife conflicts in the southern rangelands continued. Sometimes angry livestock owners lace carcasses with poison to kill predators in retaliation for killed livestock. Vultures consume these carcasses and die in large numbers. To reduce the conflict, Nature Kenya produced a report on best herding practices for Maasai Mara, Kwenia, Amboseli and Mosiro landscapes. The report documents and seeks to promote safer herding practices to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts in these areas. It is hoped that these practices will help reduce retaliatory wildlife poisoning incidents that are a major threat to vulture survival.

Membership and Marketing

A new Nature Kenya membership and marketing office is open inside the Malindi National Museum at the Old DC's Office. Nature Kenya will collaborate and work with our hosts—National Museums of Kenya and Malindi Museum Society. Amina Simba is stationed at the office and will lead bird walks for members. To join, shop or renew your membership or find out more about planned activities please call: 0725 223042. The bird walk schedule is on the back page.

For clarifications or to report your observations on species and sites, kindly contact us through email: office@naturekenya.org or telephone: 020 3537568, 0780 149200, 0751 624312, 0771 343138

Dr Paul Matiku,
Executive Director, Nature Kenya – the East Africa Natural History Society

Restoration champions of Upper Yala

BY CAROLINE CHEBET

Jane Wangithi carefully arranges a pile of propagated tree seedlings on a new tree nursery adjacent to a stream in Kusa village, Central Asembo, Bondo Sub-county. Wangithi has been on shift for the day tending to the tree nursery at a farm.

Wangithi is one of the 30 members of the Rambugu-Hafife Farmers' Group, a community-based organisation (CBO) based in Siaya County. This CBO is a constituent member of the bigger Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group (YESSG), the Nature Kenya site support group for Yala Swamp.

Rambugu-Hafife is among the vibrant community groups championing the conservation of Yala Swamp. The group's activities revolve around habitat restoration within the upper Yala area, conservation agriculture and commercial tree farming as part of its sustainability program.

"We do all these activities as members. Everyone has a slotted time to work on the farm. It is rewarding because whoever works get some allowances," Wangithi says.

Rambugu-Hafife started in 2004. The group grows farm vegetables including kales and traditional indigenous vegetables. Within its established nurseries are fruit trees that include grafted mangoes and avocados that they sell to farmers locally.

"We sell the vegetables for local consumption. We also sell commercial trees to farmers and institutions in Siaya, Busia and Kakamega," the group's chairperson, Jacob Sijenyi, said.

For their commercial tree planting venture, the group has been leasing parcels of land to plant trees, in addition to three acres they have bought. Through this venture, they supply firewood to schools. The group also supplies logs for use in construction.

"The secret behind our success is that we have vibrant activities to support our restoration activities. We have a table banking group that has grown over time, and at the moment, every farmer has a cow courtesy of the group. We have also bought land from the earnings and savings from these ventures," Sijenyi added.

The group was among the beneficiaries of water pumps provided by Nature Kenya, which they say have greatly helped in irrigating their produce.

Moses Nyawasa, Nature Kenya extension officer based in the Yala ecosystem, says the group is one of those that have managed to sustain their activities.

"The group has been able to sustain its restoration activities while undertaking conservation agriculture initiatives worth emulating," Nyawasa said.

In the past year, the group has managed to plant 20,000 indigenous trees as part of its restoration plan.

Jane Wangithi, a member of Rambugu-Hafife Farmers' Group propagating tree seedlings. PHOTO: CAROLINE CHEBET

CONSERVATION NEWS

Mida Creek Conservation Awareness Group hosted an event for children at Mida Creek during the festive holiday in December 2021. The children planted 100 mangrove seedlings during the fun filled event. PHOTO: SADAM KAILO

Members of the Mumoni Site Support Group (SSG) took part in a tree planting exercise at Mumoni forest, Kitui county where 1,000 trees were planted. PHOTO: DAVID MUSYA

A member of the Mutitu SSG plants tree at a site in Mutitu, Kitui county. PHOTO: PAULA KULALYA

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

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A team of researchers from KENWEB setting up fish sampling nets at Lake Shakababo in Tana River Delta. PHOTO: DAVID OUMA

Small scale fisheries in Tana Delta: The case of Lake Shakababo

BY DAVID OUMA, RONNIE MWANGI AND THOMAS ODEYO

The Tana River Delta is a biodiversity-rich wetland habitat that boasts of several unique animal species. One of these species is the endemic *Labeo sp. Nov. 'Baomo'* fish listed as Vulnerable in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

Researchers from Kenya Wetlands Biodiversity Research Team (KENWEB) are undertaking a project in the Delta aimed at conserving the *Labeo sp. Nov. 'Baomo'* fish species through securing its habitat. The project, funded by the Rufford Foundation, seeks to mitigate, reduce and, where possible, eliminate adverse impacts of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the Tana Delta floodplains.

The project team embarked on its first conservation activity in August 2021. The team conducted fish sampling at Lake Shakababo to collect scientific information on *Labeo sp. Nov. 'Baomo'.* The species belongs to the family *Cyprinidae* and was left unnamed due to inadequate data and specimens. During the field activity, the team did not manage to capture samples of *Labeo sp. Nov. 'Baomo'.* However, fishermen reported the presence of the species at the lake.

The team sampled seven other fish species at the lake, including Gregori's Labeo, East Coast/Tana Squeaker, Silver Catfish, Sabaki Tilapia, Sharp-tooth Catfish, Tana Bulldog and Red-fin Robber. These represent seven of 44 fish species recorded in the entire Tana Delta wetland ecosystems, indicating a high diversity of fish species.

In addition to sampling, the researchers also conducted a community education and awareness workshop with fisherfolk, pastoralists, farmers, and traders at the Tarassa trading centre in Tana Delta. A discussion on the importance of enhancing river connectivity with the floodplain wetlands and the need to strengthen the Lake Shakababo Beach Management Unit (BMU) to undertake monitoring, control, and surveillance of local fishing activities took place during the workshop.

Unsustainable fishing and the use of inappropriate gear were cited as hindrances to the growth of the local fisheries during the discussion. Fisherfolk further reported the invasion of *Prosopis juliflora* trees onto fishing sites, calling for the clearing of dead stumps in the lake area to improve fishing efficiency.

Members of the Lake Shakababo BMU received 20 standard gauged gill nets, alongside other fishing accessories, from the researchers. The donation will go a long way in motivating fisherfolk to adopt sustainable fishing practices and protect the ecosystem they rely on for their daily livelihoods.

In subsequent field activities, the project will conduct habitat restoration activities at Lake Shakababo. Restoration will involve uprooting stumps of *Prosopis juliflora* in the lake. The team will continue to support the Lake Shakababo BMU to build its capacity in fisheries resource management.

Famous stars on January evenings

BY FLEUR NG'WENO

The evening sky is filled with bright stars on clear January evenings. Look towards the east, with your back to the sunset. Can you see three bright stars in a row, with three less bright lights in a row at an angle to the first three? These stars have meaning in many cultures. For instance, for the Aymara people of the South American highlands, the three bright stars in a row were a celestial bridge.

Look closely at the three fainter lights in a row: the middle one, a fuzzy, blurred light, is M42, the Orion Nebula. You can see it with the unaided eye on a clear, dark night, or with binoculars. The glow of M42 was considered the fire of creation by the Maya people of central America. According to NASA, "The Mayan culture's likening of the Orion Nebula to a cosmic fire of creation is very apt. The nebula is an enormous cloud of dust and gas where vast numbers of new stars are being forged."

To the ancient Greeks, the two sets of three stars were part of the constellation or star pattern of Orion the Hunter or Warrior. The three bright stars in a row are Orion's belt, and the three less bright light are his sword, hanging from his belt. Four bright stars like the corners of a box form Orion's body. Imagine brilliant blue-green Rigel, at the upper right, as Orion's knee kicking into the sky; and orange Betelgeuse, at the lower left, as Orion's left shoulder.

Viewed from Greece, Orion seemed to walk across the sky, rising in the east and setting in the west. Actually, it is the Earth that spins towards the east. And to us near the equator, Orion seems to lie on his back as he rises in the east.

The Hunter is followed by his hunting dogs: Sirius, the brightest star we see at night, in the southeast, and Procyon in the east. Here near the equator, we can also see the second brightest star, Canopus, low in the southeast. To the right of Canopus, the bright star Achernar is low in the southwest.

To the north of Orion there are constellations, or star patterns, named by the ancient Greeks.

The Pleiades cluster or "Seven Sisters" is high overhead. Between the Pleiades and Orion, the Hyades cluster forms a cone-like shape, the face of Taurus the Bull. Aldebaran, a bright, reddish star, the Bull's fiery eye, is at one end of the cone.

Further north, bright stars form a large pentagon, Auriga the Charioteer. At Auriga's northern end is the bright star Capella. Below Capella, low in the north, is the constellation Cassiopeia, shaped like the letter M. To the west of Cassiopeia is the Great Square of Pegasus.

In the northeast, between Auriga and the dog Procyon, the constellation Gemini, the twins, is rising. The waxing moon is near the Pleiades on January 12, near Aldebaran on the 13th, and near the star El Nath, the tip of the northern horn of the Bull, on the 14th.

In the morning before dawn, the beautiful constellation of the Southern Cross is prominent, upright in the southern sky.

Planets, Jan '22

Beautiful, brilliant Venus sinks into the sunset the first week of January, passes between the sun and the Earth, and reappears in the sunrise at mid-month. Early in January, little Mercury rises above the sunset, appearing close to Saturn and even brighter on January 12-13. Mercury then sinks back towards the western horizon, followed by Saturn.

Jupiter is the bright light in the west, setting during the evening. The slim crescent moon is near Saturn on the 4th, near Jupiter on January 5-6. Mars is in the east before dawn; the waning moon is near Mars on the 29th.

Moon, Jan '22

New moon Jan 2. First quarter Jan 9. Full moon Jan 17. Last quarter Jan 25. (Feb 1: new moon.)

Asteroid fly-by

There are bits of rock and dust in space (as well as man-made debris). The larger rocks are called asteroids, and many of them are tracked by astronomers. These scientists say a large asteroid will safely pass by Earth on 18 January.

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks, Nairobi
In January 2022, participants will meet at the designated venue. Please observe Covid-19 protocols: No sharing of binoculars and guidebooks and no pooled transport. Masks are a must and you may carry your own sanitizer.

Wednesday 5th January, 2022 – Museum Grounds / Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

Wednesday 12th January, 2022 – Manguo Pond, Limuru, with the African Waterbird Census. Meet at 8.30am at the Manguo Pond, off the upper Nairobi-Naivasha Road, just past the flyover to Limuru.

Wednesday 19th January, 2022 – Dandora Sewage Works (Nairobi Oxygenation Ponds, Ruai). With the African Waterbird Census. Meet at 8.30am at the main entrance to the Sewage Works/Oxygenation Ponds off Koma Rock Road in Ruai, Nairobi. Birding and counting likely to end at 2 pm. For more directions please e-mail <news@naturekenya.org> Or WhatsApp 0738 682773 Or phone 0720 335819

Wednesday 26th January, 2022 – Karen Blixen Museum. Meet at 8.30am in the Museum's Car Park. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. Turn left at Shell Petrol Station onto Karen Road. The Museum is about 1.5Kms after Karen Country Club.

Sunday Birdwatch
January 16th Sunday Bird Watch – Ondiri Swamp, Kikuyu. Meet at 8:30am at the swamp. Ondiri Swamp is the only quaking bog in Kenya, a presumed source of the Nairobi River, and will be the site of the World Wetlands Day celebrations on 2.2.22.

Please sign up with <news@naturekenya.org> Or WhatsApp 0738 682773 Or phone 0720 335819 to get detailed directions to the meeting place.

If you have questions, please write <news@naturekenya.org> or phone 0780-149200.

January 2022 Waterbird Counts on the Rift Valley lakes:
Lakes Bogoria and Baringo, January 7 and 8.

Lakes Nakuru, Solai and Elmenteita, January 21 and 22.

Lakes Naivasha, Sonachi, and Oloidien, January 28 and 29.

If you would like to take part, and you are experienced in identifying and counting waterbirds and can meet the group at the site, please contact Ireene Madindou at <ilhanmadindou@gmail.com>or phone 0701-028739.

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds will take place on January 11, 18 and 25. Please confirm with Titus Imboma <Imbomati911@gmail.com> Phone 0721-649452.

It's NEW! Bird Walks in Malindi!
Tuesday 4th January 2022 – Malindi Museum grounds and Shoreline. Meet at 8am in the open space in front of the 'Old DC's Office' near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Thursday 6th January 2022 – Malindi Museum and surroundings. Meet at 4:00pm in the open space in front of the 'Old DC's Office' near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Tuesday 11th January 2022 - Malindi Museum grounds and Vasco da Gama pillar. Meet at 7 am in the open space in front of 'Old DC's Office' near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

White-winged Black Tern. PHOTO: PETER USHER

Thursday 13th January 2022 – Malindi Museum and Malindi Harbour. Meet at 5pm in the open space in front of the 'Old DC's Office' near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Tuesday 18th January 2022 – Malindi Museum grounds and Shoreline. Meet at 8am in the open space in front of the 'Old DC's Office' near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Saturday 22nd January 2022 – Malindi and Surroundings. Meet at 6:30am in the open space in front of the 'Old DC's Office' near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Tuesday 25th January 2022 - Malindi Museum grounds and Shoreline. Meet at 7 am in the open space in front of 'Old DC's Office' near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Saturday 29 January 2022 - Malindi Museum grounds/Old town/ Shoreline and Vasco da Gama pillar. Meet at 7am in the open space in front of the 'Old DC's Office' near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

For more information, contact Amina Simba at <aminasimba6@gmail.com> or phone 0725 223042.

Mombasa Birdwalks are held the 3rd Saturday of each month. To check meeting time and place, check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Or contact: Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540 or Kelvin Mazera <klvnrua@yahoo.com> / 0720-928783

Send your birdingrecords to:
Kenya Bird Map<http://kenya.birdmap.africa/>

If you have questions re KBM, write to <kenyabirdmap@naturekenya.org>

Stay updated with the birding scene in Kenya by signing in to the new **Kenyabirdsnet** platform:

https://groups.google.com/d/forum/kenyabirdsnet

After signing in you will be able to post your records to:kenyabirdsnet@googlegroups.com

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For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org